

human embryos or embryonic stem cells was used in the manufacture or testing of drugs registered after 1 July 2004.

The change is the result of lobbying by Senator Brian Harradine, a staunch Catholic, who persuaded the Minister for Health, Kay Patterson, to require that information on use of embryonic material be included in literature for doctors and in product information sheets accompanying medicines.

In the parliamentary debate late last year on legislation authorising research using human embryos and stem cells, Senator Patterson argued that people who opposed the research should be consistent and also refuse to accept products developed as a result of it.

Senator Harradine countered by arguing that consumers could only exercise their moral objections if the government required disclosure of information in the same way that food was labelled to disclose content from genetically modified organisms.

Bob Burton *Canberra*

The TGA Report is at www.health.gov.au/tga/docs/html/stemcells.htm

Heavy drinking costs the NHS £1.7bn a year, report says

Treating illnesses and injuries caused by alcohol misuse is costing the NHS up to £1.7bn (\$2.8bn; €2.4bn) a year, according to a new report.

Heavy drinking is resulting in an increasing number of premature deaths, health problems, social disorder, and injuries, says the report, which states that in the United Kingdom up to 40% of men's drinking sessions can be classed as binge drinking.

But the total costs, including the costs of absenteeism, alcohol related crime, and human suffering, may be as high as £20bn—almost three times the estimated £7bn in excise duty on alcohol that the government receives each year.

The report, produced by the prime minister's Strategy Unit,

shows that around 35% of all attendances in emergency departments may be due to alcohol, costing more than £500m a year.

"A study commissioned for this analysis showed that alcohol places a very significant burden on A&E [accident and emergency] departments at peak times: 41% of all attendees were positive for alcohol consumption," says the report.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

The *Interim Analytical Report* of the national alcohol harm reduction strategy is at www.number10.gov.uk/files/pdf/interim_report.pdf

Ethical issues of pharmacogenetics must be addressed, says Nuffield Council

Pharmacogenetics—the study of how genetic variation affects a patient's response to drugs—holds the promise of safe and effective treatments in the future. But scientists must address ethical and policy issues of this technology if the potential benefits are to be realised. That is the message from the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in a report published this week.

Many drug companies are hopeful that this new technology will lead to the development of "the right medicine, for the right patient, at the right dose."

But the council, an independent body that looks at the ethical issues raised by developments in medicine and biology, is cautious about making such claims, as pharmacogenetic testing is still at an embryonic stage—partly because no accurate or easy to use genetic tests are available at present.

The report addresses a number of questions, ranging from consent and confidentiality of the genetic information yielded from the tests to whether the tests should be available over the counter or through the internet. Debashis Singh *London*

Pharmacogenetics: Ethical Issues is available at www.nuffieldbioethics.org/pharmacogenetics

A cigarette by any other name kills just as well

Andrew Iles *BMJ*

A campaign to expose misleading descriptions and marketing of cigarettes was launched this week by Cancer Research UK. So called "light" or "mild" cigarettes are no less dangerous than regular cigarettes, the charity says.

Although manufacturers will no longer be able to use terms such as light or mild from the end of this month—as the regulations of the European Union's Directive on Tobacco Product Regulation come into effect—the companies have started to use certain marketing ploys to get round the regulations.

They will continue to market "low tar" cigarettes through design changes, so that what used to be known as light

brands, such as Drum light (pictured below), are now packaged in light colours, to distinguish them from the regular versions. The companies are also using names such as "white" and "silver."

The £15m (\$25m; €22m) campaign, "Death Repackaged," is being funded by the Department of Health and will be spread across TV, radio, newspapers, and billboards. The advertisements will feature deadly animals (a great white shark, a crocodile, and a rattlesnake) with friendly names, such as Susie and Rosie, and will convey the message that giving something a nice name does not make it any less dangerous. □